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SOME NOTES ON THE USE OF *CAN* AND *COUTH* AS
PRETERITIVE AUXILIARIES IN EARLY AND
MIDDLE SCOTTISH POETRY

Students of Scottish literature are familiar with the use of *can* and *couth* with a following infinitive to form a compound or periphrastic preterite as is done to-day with *did*. Little information concerning the origin, development, or use of this idiom has been available to the student. The editors of the *New English Dictionary* have this to say of the idiom:

Can in M. E. and early Modern Eng. used for *Gan* pa. t. of *ginnan*, to begin. In the early MSS. of Cursor Mundi *gan* and *can* constantly interchange, but the evidence shows that *can* was fully established in Northern use early in the 14 C., and its beginnings were evidently in the period before 1300, from which no Northern documents survive. It was in its origin a variant of *gan*, apparently merely phonetic; in later times, when used as a simple auxiliary of tense, its identity with *gan* tended to be forgotten; it was, from its form and construction, curiously associated with the preceding verb *Can*, and this occasionally led to a forgetfulness of its being a past tense, and to a substitution of *couth*, *coud*, *could*, the pa.t. of that verb. *Can* prevailed in Northern and North Midland poets till the 16 C., and in the end of that century it was greatly affected by Spenser and his fellow archaists and followers. Its main function is now filled by *did*, though the original *gan* is still a favorite note of ballad poetry.

This comment on the history of the idiom provides no explanation for the unvoicing of the initial consonant. Little assistance can be got from the vocabularies of Northern English or Scottish. When the student comes across a word that seems to furnish a similar phenomenon, he finds on investigation that he has wrongly derived the word. Thus Scottish *callant* has been hastily identified with French *galant*. But the editors of the *New English Dictionary* have shown that it is identical with Flemish *kalant*, which is equivalent to French *caland*. A genuine case of the unvoicing of the initial consonant may occur in *caikie* which is reported in Jamieson's dictionary as being used in Peeblesshire for *gaikie*, which is used in Selkirkshire to mean *gawky*. Murray and his associates, however, say nothing of this form. The unvoicing that has taken place in *can*, then, remains an anomaly unless *caikie* is considered an instance. The attempt to discover the causes for it leaves the investigator face to face with the unknowable, which so frequently confronts the student of Scottish.

The time at which the form was adopted in Scottish is likewise uncertain. The editors of the *New English Dictionary*, speaking of its use both as Northern and Scottish, say that "the beginnings were evidently in the period before 1300." But this cannot be taken too literally as regards Scottish. In the Edinburgh manuscript of Barbour's *Bruce*, which was written by John Ramsay in 1489, the form *gan* is used almost exclusively throughout the first three books and rather frequently in the following books. This variation cannot be attributed to Ramsay himself, for in the previous year he had written the manuscript of Blind Harry's *Wallace*, in which *gan* is not used. If he is identical with J. de R. chaplain who wrote the Cambridge manuscript of the *Bruce* in 1487, there is even less reason to credit him with causing the variation, for *can* is used consistently instead of *gan* throughout this manuscript. *Gan* must have been in the manuscript Ramsay was following in 1489, and it must have been familiar to the man who put it there, whether Barbour himself or a scribe. The date cannot be determined any more definitely from the extant monuments. However, *can* had established itself as the usual form by the time Wyntoun wrote the first version of his *Chronykill*, which was before 1424, for in the Wemyss manuscript, the oldest of this version, *can* is used consistently. Barbour may have used *can* and *gan* interchangeably. *Gan* continued to be a familiar form throughout the period. It was used by Gawin Douglass apparently in preference to *can*. Moreover it survived both *can* and *couth*, and became a convention of ballad poetry.

The periphrastic preterite, whether formed with *can*, *gan*, or *couth*, was merely a metrical device of the poet for obtaining the requisite number of syllables to fill the line, or for throwing the desired word into the rime position; usually the latter. It is not used at all in the alliterative poem *Morte Arthur*, and it occurs only 4 times in *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knyght*. The form occurs in 189 lines of Barbour's *Bruce*, and in 185 of these the infinitive is the rime word. In 93 cases the auxiliary and the infinitive are the last words of the line; in 72 of these 93 cases the infinitive is monosyllabic, so that the periphrastic preterite occupies only the last two syllables of the line. The auxiliary and the infinitive, when not coming in immediate sequence, are usually separated by the subject of the auxiliary, the object of the infinitive, or an adverbial modifier. But more words may intervene.

In the *Bruce* the auxiliary does not appear in the first foot of the line; in 7 cases it appears in the second foot. It can take the accent or not, as the metre demands. Blind Harry used a longer line than Barbour, but in his writing much the same phenomena are to be observed as have just been described. The infinitive is the rime word in 266 cases out of 281 in which the periphrastic preterite with *can* or *couth* is used. In 168 cases the auxiliary and the infinitive are the last two words in the line. The auxiliary rarely occurs before the third foot of the line; but it may be found in either the first or the second foot. *To* does not occur with the infinitive in the *Bruce*; it occurs 2 times in the *Wallace*, and is found occasionally in other poems. In the *Wallace* the auxiliary and the infinitive in 80 cases are separated by the subject of the auxiliary or the object of the infinitive, but an adverb or a prepositional phrase of some length may intervene. When the auxiliary is in the first or second foot of the line, more words intervene.

It should be said before going into a more detailed study of the matter that this periphrastic preterite is essentially a narrative idiom. It is to be found most frequently in those poems that chronicle the progress of events. It is not likely to occur frequently in lyric poems that express moods and emotions; neither is it to be expected in dialog or conversation. It is rarely used in direct discourse. It is found almost universally in the third person. Furthermore, it is excluded from certain kinds of narrative. For instance, Blind Harry frequently wrote passages in which the movement of the narrative is very rapid and spirited to describe exciting or very important action; in such passages he carefully avoided any use of the periphrastic preterite, but used the simple preterite. There are, also, a number of short narrative poems, such as *Peblis to the Play*, in which the idiom does not occur at all.

The poems under discussion are to be examined in accordance with three tests. The *auxiliary test* will be used to determine in what proportion *can* and *couth* are used as the auxiliary of the infinitive. The *vowel test* will be used to determine the vowel quality of the accented syllable of the infinitive. In case that two syllables of the infinitive receive an accent from the verse, the one nearer the auxiliary will be considered. There are two parts of this vowel test; A shows the proportion of one certain vowel to all other vowels, B shows in what proportion *can* and *couth* are used with each vowel. No distinction for vowel quantity

will be attempted with *a, o, u*. In the case of *a*, the quality of the vowel remains the same; the other two vowels are used so rarely that nothing is to be gained from so elaborate a classification. The *vocabulary test* will be used to determine what words are frequently repeated as infinitives so as to become conventional phrases or something approaching rime-tags.

In the course of the investigation, however, two main difficulties will be encountered. The first of these will be caused by the variant readings of the manuscripts. The method of meeting this difficulty will be explained as it arises in each case. The second difficulty will be caused by the uncertainty as to the exact meaning of the auxiliary. In some cases it is evidently preteritive; in other cases it is indubitably potential. But in many instances, especially with *couth*, the possibility of potential signification is very strong, but there is also a possibility that the form is preteritive also. In such cases it would seem that the form has a double meaning, the potentiality of performance and this potentiality put into effect; that is to say, *he couth do it* meaning *he could do it and he did it*. In the same way *gan* is troublesome. In many cases it seems to have the double signification of inchoative action and continued action; that is to say, *he began to do it and he kept on doing it*. In each case, unless the possibility of preteritive signification is very strong, the form as a rule will be counted in the reckoning.

Before leaving the matter of introductory remarks and general explanations, perhaps another point should be considered. It not rarely happens that a single auxiliary is followed by two infinitives. In making the proportion of *can* to *couth* the reckoning, unless otherwise stated, is based on the number of infinitives instead of on the number of times the auxiliary makes a physical appearance. The number of double infinitives is not large enough at any time to disturb the balance.

The manuscript difficulty in the *Bruce* has been spoken of. The Cambridge manuscript, written by J. de R. chaplain in 1487, reads *can*; the Edinburgh manuscript made by John Ramsay in 1489 reads *gan* as a rule. But for the purposes of this study no attempt has been made to differentiate *can* and *gan*.¹ When the *auxiliary test* is applied, the proportion according to the reckoning

¹ However, the importance of *gan* in the Edinburgh manuscript is seen when the matter of variant readings for *couth* is considered. The present writer feels very strongly that a *gan* in the Edinburgh manuscript where the

previously described is *can* 185; *couth* 4. If the 4 cases of Edinburgh *couth* for Cambridge *can* are subtracted, the proportion stands *can* 181; *couth* 4: hence the assumption that *can* is more likely the original form. There are all told only 6 cases of *couth* as a variant for *can* in both manuscripts. Even if these were counted against the instances of *can* common to both, the proportion then would be only *can* 181; *couth* 10. It seems best, therefore, to adhere to the original proportion, *can* 185; *couth* 4. One can adopt one of two conclusions in regard to this proportion: either that Barbour consistently wrote *can* or *gan*, and that this has been corrupted occasionally by the scribes; or that *couth* was just entering the language, and that Barbour availed himself of it sparingly.

When the vowels in the accented syllables of the infinitives are examined, it is discovered that *a* occurs 118 times, *ī* 25, *ē* 27, *ȳ* 10, *ɛ* 5, *o* 1, and *u* 3. The preference for *a* is unmistakable. *Vowel test* A yields the proportion *a* 118; all other vowels 71. The results of *vowel test* B are postponed for the summary.

When the vocabulary test is applied, it is found that three words occur more frequently than others. Barbour used *tak* or *ta* 30 times, *ga* or *gan* 25 times, and *mak* or *ma* 21 times. He used *say* 12 times, *cry* 11 times, *sla* 7 times, *hy* 6 times, *se* 6 times. He used also, once or oftener, *assale*, *rass*, *umbecast*, *falze*, *fall*, *blaw*, *knaw*, *hald*, *chais*, *fair*, *stand*, *gnaw*, *scharw*, *thraw*, *payne*, *draw*, *rair*, *ryd*, *occupy*, *inbryng*, *dyng*, *thring*, *spryng*, *ficht*, *rely*, *flyng*, *abyde*, *schute*, *tell*, *ken*, *wed*, *row*, *purvay*, *assay*, *found*, *bet*, *pray*, *abandoun*, *appeir*, *dreid*, *ber*, *ressawe*, and *tret*. In all he used 51 verbs as infinitives.

In the case of Wyntoun's *Orygynal Chronykil*, a fresh difficulty meets the investigator. There seems to be three different versions of the work made by Wyntoun himself, which show many variations in wording and phraseology. Furthermore, the manuscripts are all later than Wyntoun's immediate time, and there is

Cambridge manuscript reads *couth* is more likely to represent an original *can* or *gan* in Barbour's own version. Only the occurrences of *couth* common to both manuscripts have been counted. But when the Edinburgh manuscript reads *couth* for a *can* in the Cambridge manuscript, it has been assumed for reasons that are obvious, that *can* is more likely to be the original form and that the presence of *couth* is due to a scribal error. There are only 4 such cases of *couth* in the whole poem.

good reason to believe that the scribes were none too careful in their transcriptions and that they were not above tampering with the text. In addition, the manuscripts of each version differ among themselves on minor points. In order to avoid the difficulties of this general confusion, the Wemyss manuscript, which seems to represent the earliest version of the *Chronykil*, has been made the basis for this study. In all, 105 cases of the idiom were observed, a remarkably small number for a poem of so many thousand lines, but in 12 of these the meaning of *couth* is doubtful. If these cases are omitted from the reckoning, the score stands 69 in favor of *can* to 26 in favor of *couth*. It is to be noted that the proportion in favor of *couth* is much larger than in the *Bruce*.

When the vowel test is applied, it is discovered that *a* is the favorite. It is found in 42 cases out of a total of 95. This is a smaller proportion than in the *Bruce*. \bar{e} appears in 26 cases, \bar{i} in 13, \bar{e} in 9, \bar{i} in 3, *o* in 1, and *u* in 1. *Can* is used with *a* 31 times, *couth* 11 times; *can* is used with \bar{e} 18 times, *couth* 8 times; *can* is used with \bar{i} 10 times, *couth* 3 times; *can* is used with \bar{e} 5 times, *couth* 4 times; *can* is used with \bar{i} 3 times, with *o* 1 time, and with *u* 1 time, *couth* not appearing with any one of the three. No vowel appears with *couth* oftener than with *can*.

When the vocabulary test is applied, *pas* is found to occur 8 times, *mak* or *ma* 9 times, *ga* 5 times, *say* 9 times, *ta* 3 times, and *se* 3 times. All of these except *pas* and *tak* occur either with *can* or *couth*, but more frequently with *can*; *pas* and *tak* occur only with *can*. 63 different words are used as the second part of the compound; this number is an increase over the *Bruce*, and indicates an extension of the usage.

In the case of Blind Harry's *Wallace*, the investigator is spared the difficulty of variant readings, for there is only one manuscript of the poem. When the auxiliary test is applied, Harry is found to have employed the periphrastic preterite in all 283 times, 138 with *can* and 145 with *couth*. When the vowel test is applied, it is found that *a* occurs 140 times, \bar{e} 63 times, \bar{i} 33 times, \bar{e} 12 times, \bar{i} , 19 times, *o* 8 times, and *u* 11 times. The proportion is *a* 140; all other vowels 143. *A* still maintains its lead, but the proportion is considerably smaller than Barbour's, being less than fifty per cent of the whole. *Can* is used with *a* 81 times, *couth* 59 times; *can* is used with \bar{e} 22 times, *couth* 41 times; *can* is used with \bar{i} 14 times, *couth* 19 times; *can* is used with \bar{e} 3 times, *couth* 9 times;

can is used with *ȝ* 11 times, *couth* 5 times; *can* is used with *o* 1 time, *couth* 7 times; *can* is used with *u* 6 times, *couth* 5 times. *Can* exceeds *couth* only in the case of *a*, *i*, and *u*; in the latter case the score is nearly even. When the vocabulary test is applied, it is found that *far* occurs 26 times, *tak* 18, *pas* 14, *draw* 14, *gang* 12, and *ride* 6. *Mak*, a favorite with Barbour and Wyntoun, occurs only 4 times. *Can* is used 15 times with *far*, *couth* 11 times; *can* is used 10 times with *gang*, *couth* 2 times; *can* is used 12 times with *tak*, *couth* 6 times; *can* is used 8 times with *draw*, *couth* 6 times; *can* is used 5 times with *pas*, *couth* 9 times; *can* is used 3 times with *ride*, *couth* 9 times. *Couth* is the favorite auxiliary with only two words, *pas* and *ride*; but of the 131 verbs that serve as the infinitive *couth* is used with 76, *can* with 55. This number indicates an even wider extension of *couth*. Apparently *can* was the favorite auxiliary with the traditional verbs that had been used from the time of Barbour onwards, and *couth* was likely to be used when a new verb was used as the infinitive.

Holland's *Buik of the Howlat* was written about the same time as Blind Harry's *Wallace* or shortly before. The periphrastic preterite is found to occur with 17 verbs. *Can* occurs as the auxiliary only 1 time; then the form is inverted and the auxiliary made the rime word. Both manuscripts of the poem are very late. It is barely possible that a scribe was responsible for the great preponderance of *couth*, but it seems hardly necessary to account for the phenomenon in this way. If Blind Harry's usage indicates what was customary at the time, *can* would be expected to occur with any frequency only with *a* or *ȝ*. *Can* occurs with *fle*, a verb containing *ē*. The verbs used with *couth* are *haf*, *say*, *growe*, *argewe*, *wend*, *clos*, *hyng*, *deir*, *conquir* (rimed *conqueir*), *chewiss*, *perchess*, *cary*, *mak*, *werk*, *kyth*, and *ban*. *Couth* is used with *a* 4 times, with *ē* 4 times, with *ī* 1 time, with *ē* 4 times, with *ȝ* 1 time, with *o* 2 times. *U* does not occur at all. By the middle of the fifteenth century, it is evident, *can* was losing, and *couth* rapidly gaining, favor as the conventional auxiliary to form the periphrastic preterite.

The investigator was relieved of manuscript difficulties in the case of Blind Harry and Holland only to find himself beset with them in Henryson's poems.² Probably the best method of pro-

² There is no single complete manuscript collection of the poems; some of them are to be found in one manuscript or early printed edition, some in another,

cedure under these circumstances is to group the poems according to the date of the earliest versions extant and to determine the usage in each group. Accordingly, the first group will include the poems found in the Asloane manuscript, *Orpheus and Eurydice* and the fable, *The Uplandis Mouss and the Borowstoun Mouss*, which is usually entitled *The Twa Myis*. The few poems contained in the Makculloch and Gray manuscripts can well be placed in the second group which will contain the *Fables* according to the Charteris edition of 1570 and the shorter poems from various manuscript collections all of which are later than 1560. The third group will consist entirely of *The Testament of Cresseid* according to the Charteris edition of 1593, for Thynne's earlier version is corrupted with Southern forms.

When the auxiliary test is applied to all three groups, it is found that *can* is used with 66 verbs, *couth* with 57. In the first group the score stands *can* 22, *couth* 10; in the second group *can* 30, *couth* 39; in the third group *can* 14, *couth* 7. If the auxiliary test is any guide to chronology, the proportion of *can* to *couth* found here would indicate that Henryson's work is earlier than Blind Harry's or Holland's. It would lend support to the theory that the Henryson of the poems is identical with the "venerable Master Robert Henryson" who is named as incorporated member of the University of Glasgow, September 10, 1642.

The results gained from applying the vowel tests to the different groups can best be shown in a table.

and all of them of different dates. The oldest manuscript that contains any of Henryson's poem is the Makculloch, a notebook that belonged to Mangus Makculloch who was a student at the University of Louvain in 1477. The fly-leaves of this book contain various fragments of Scottish literature, but the palæographers and scholars have not informed the public at what time these entries were made. However, the spelling shows greater age than some of the manuscripts. The Bannatyne Draft shows great agreement with the Makculloch so far as they contain the same material, but it was much later. The Gray and Asloane manuscripts are next the Makculloch in age, both dating from the early sixteenth century. The volume of miscellanies published by Chepman and Myllar in 1508 contained Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, *Wani of Wyse Men*, and *Praise of Age*. The oldest extant version of *The Testament of Cresseid* is that published at the end of Thynne's edition of Chaucer in 1582. Other poems are found in the Bannatyne and Maitland manuscripts which are later than 1560. When the different versions fail to agree, the investigator has small chance of determining just what Henryson wrote.

<i>Can</i>		<i>Couth</i>	
With <i>a</i> .	24	With <i>a</i>	22
Group I	9	Group I	4
Group II	9	Group II	14
Group III	6	Group III	4
With <i>ī</i>	7	With <i>ī</i>	9
Group I	1	Group I	2
Group II	6	Group II	6
Group III	0	Group III	1
With <i>ȳ</i>	11	With <i>ȳ</i>	7
Group I	5	Group I	1
Group II	4	Group II	5
Group III	2	Group III	1
With <i>ē</i>	12	With <i>ē</i>	12
Group I	2	Group I	4
Group II	9	Group II	8
Group III	1	Group III	0
With <i>ǣ</i>	4	With <i>ǣ</i>	1
Group I	2	Group I	0
Group II	0	Group II	1
Group III	2	Group III	0
With <i>o</i>	5	With <i>o</i>	3
Group I	2	Group I	0
Group II	2	Group II	3
Group III	1	Group III	0
With <i>u</i>	3	With <i>u</i>	3
Group I	1	Group I	0
Group II	0	Group II	2
Group III	2	Group III	1

The proportion of *a* to all other vowels is 46 to 77, a much smaller proportion than Blind Harry's. *A*, however, is still the favorite single vowel; the next in popularity is *ē*.³

³ If, however, the poems contained in the Bannatyne manuscript are considered separately, and the Bannatyne version made the basis of an independent investigation, a different state of affairs is revealed. The auxiliary proportion stands *can* 39; *couth* 44. The proportion for vowel test A stands *a* 26; all other vowels 57. *Can* is used with *a* 9 times, *couth* 17 times; *can* is used with *ē* 7 times, *couth* 12 times; *can* is used with *ī* 7 times, *couth* 7 times; *can* is used with *ǣ* 5 times, *couth* 1 time; *can* is used with *ø* 7, *couth* 3 times; *can* is used with *u* 1 time, *couth* 1 time. The poems that are included in the Bannatyne manuscript were edited by Bannatyne himself as comparison with the Bannatyne transcript shows when a poem is contained in both. Bannatyne himself may have been responsible for these variations in the poems of Henryson; but he can be held accountable only for substituting *couth* in place of *can*. However, it is also possible that the originals from which he worked may have been responsible. Some support is given the latter supposition by the fact that *can* is used oftener than *couth* in *Orpheus and Eurydice* and the fable of *The Mous and the Paddock* even in the Bannatyne manuscript. Whenever the Bannatyne manuscript differs from an older manuscript for any author, it is usually found that *couth* is used for *can*.

When the vocabulary is examined it is found that Henryson in all used 72 different words as the infinitive in the second part of the compound. Not many words are repeated; *mak* and *cry* occur 6 times each, and are the only ones that occur oftener than 3 times. *Declair*, *call*, *pas*, *hyng*, *sing*, *say*, and *crepe* occur 3 times each.

Can and *couth* are found very rarely as auxiliaries to form a periphrastic preterite in the poems of Dunbar. This is partly accounted for by the fact that the idiom is peculiar to narrative poetry and that it occurs very rarely in lyric poetry. However, on most occasions in which Dunbar found it convenient to add an extra syllable to his line by using a compound form of the verb, he used *did*. In fact *did* so used, is to be found in the poems of Henryson. It is the usual preteritive auxiliary with Dunbar and Lyndsay, and a frequent idiom with Gawin Douglass. In the study of Dunbar's usage *The Twa Freiris of Berwick* has not been considered Dunbar's poem. Dunbar used *can* 3 times to form the periphrastic preterite, *couth* 8 times. *Can* is used 1 time with *ȝ*, 2 times with *ē*. *Couth* is used 3 times with *a*, 3 times with *ē*, and 1 time with *ȝ*. It also occurs with the word *nod*, but the exact quality of the vowel is difficult to ascertain; it rhymes with *God* and *od*. *Say* occurs 2 times with *can* and 2 times with *couth*, in one of which for the sake of the rime it is spelled *seyne*. In making this reckoning the reading of the oldest manuscripts has been followed; thus 3 cases of *couth* in the Bannatyne version of *The Tournament between the Tailor and the Sowtar* have been omitted because the Asloan manuscript, which is the older, gives widely variant reading for the lines in which *couth* occurs.

Douglass, like Dunbar, had a strong liking for *did* as the preteritive auxiliary. The poems used as the basis for investigation in his case are *The Palice of Honour*, *King Hart* and the succeeding stanzas called *Conscience* and the first five books of his translation of the *Æneid*. In *The Palice of Honour*, *did* is the auxiliary in all but 1 case. However, in the case of Douglass's poems a fresh difficulty confronts the investigator. *Can* occurs in the shorter poems, but in the two manuscripts of the *Æneid* there is a variation between *gan* and *can*. The Edinburgh manuscript, which served as the basis for Small's edition of 1874, reads *can* for the first two books and the first 125 lines of the third

book, but *gan* thereafter with few exceptions; the Cambridge manuscript, which served as the basis of the edition for the Bannatyne Club in 1839, reads *gan* throughout with only a few exceptions. However, for the purposes of this study *can* and *gan* may be considered identical as in the case of Barbour. *Can* or *gan* occurs 160 times, *couth* 10 times if 4 doubtful cases are considered. Otherwise the proportion stands *can* 160; *couth* 6. This reminds one of Barbour's usage. When the vowel test A is applied and the doubtful cases of *couth* not counted, it is found that *a* occurs 46 times, *ē* 47, *ī* 28, *ě* 14, *ȳ* 7, *o* 9, *u* 14, and *oi* 1. The proportion of *a* to all other vowels is 46 to 160; but it is no longer the favorite vowel, being displaced by *ē*, which, however, exceeds it by only 1. It is useless to apply vowel test B when the proportion of *couth* is so small. Douglass's usage is seen to be decidedly archaic. When the vocabulary test is applied, it is found that Douglass was not given to repeating many verbs; *behold* occurs 9 times, *spreid* 5 times, *hald*, *say*, and *appeir* 4 times each, *declair*, *embrace*, *tak*, *beit*, *pray*, and *espy* 3 times each.

Douglass exercised a great deal of freedom with the idiom. He used more compound infinitives than his predecessors, and he more frequently placed the auxiliary in one line and the infinitive in the next. Furthermore, he took more liberty with the position of the auxiliary in the line. It is the first word in a number of lines. But the order of the auxiliary and the infinitive is rarely inverted so as to make the auxiliary the rime word.

Lyndsay's usage of *can* and *couth* can be dismissed in a few words. *Did* is the usual preteritive auxiliary in his poems. However, *can*, *couth*, and *gan* all three appear; but in the case of *gan* the inchoative signification of modern *began* is exceedingly strong in every case noted, and the form is therefore something more than a mere auxiliary of tense. *Can* appears 2 times, *couth* 4 times. The only vowels that occur are *ē*, *ě*, and *ī*. *Can* is used 1 time with *ē*, *couth* 2 times; *can* is used 1 time with *ī*, *couth* 1 time; *couth* only is used 1 time with *ě*. The words used are *crye*, *appreve*, *teche*, *confesse*, *keip*, and *ryde*. No word occurs more than 1 time.

A few words might be said here by way of summarizing the results obtained from this investigation. *Can* was the earlier form, but after its first appearance in Barbour's *Bruce* it began to lose ground steadily to *couth*. By the time of Henryson *did* had gained a foothold. It gained in popularity thereafter until it

ultimately displaced both *can* and *couth*. The results of the tests in the case of Barbour, Wyntoun, Blind Harry, Holland, and Henryson might best be placed in tabular form for the convenience of the reader.

THE AUXILIARY TEST

Barbour	<i>Can</i> 185; <i>couth</i> 44
Wyntoun	<i>Can</i> 69; <i>couth</i> 26
Blind Harry	<i>Can</i> 138; <i>couth</i> 145
Holland	<i>Can</i> 1; <i>couth</i> 16
Henryson	<i>Can</i> 66; <i>couth</i> 57

THE VOWEL TEST

A. PROPORTION OF *A* TO ALL OTHER VOWELS

Barbour	<i>a</i> 118; all other vowels 71
Wyntoun	<i>a</i> 42; all other vowels 53
Blind Harry	<i>a</i> 140; all other vowels 143
Holland	<i>a</i> 4; all other vowels 13
Henryson	<i>a</i> 46; all other vowels 77

B. Proportion of vowels used with *can* or *couth*.

B. PROPORTION OF VOWELS USED WITH *CAN* OR *COUTH*

<i>Barbour</i>		<i>Wyntoun</i>	
<i>a</i>	<i>can</i> 116; <i>couth</i> 2	<i>a</i>	<i>can</i> 31; <i>couth</i> 11
<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 25; <i>couth</i> 1	<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 18; <i>couth</i> 8
<i>ī</i>	<i>can</i> 25; <i>couth</i> 0	<i>ī</i>	<i>can</i> 10; <i>couth</i> 13
<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 5; <i>couth</i> 1	<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 5; <i>couth</i> 4
<i>ȳ</i>	<i>can</i> 10; <i>couth</i> 0	<i>ȳ</i>	<i>can</i> 3; <i>couth</i> 0
<i>o</i>	<i>can</i> 1; <i>couth</i> 0	<i>o</i>	<i>can</i> 1; <i>couth</i> 0
<i>u</i>	<i>can</i> 3; <i>couth</i> 0	<i>u</i>	<i>can</i> 1; <i>couth</i> 0
<i>Blind Harry</i>		<i>Holland</i>	
<i>a</i>	<i>can</i> 81; <i>couth</i> 59	<i>a</i>	<i>can</i> 0; <i>couth</i> 4
<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 22; <i>couth</i> 41	<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 1; <i>couth</i> 4
<i>ī</i>	<i>can</i> 14; <i>couth</i> 19	<i>ī</i>	<i>can</i> 0; <i>couth</i> 1
<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 3; <i>couth</i> 9	<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 0; <i>couth</i> 4
<i>ȳ</i>	<i>can</i> 11; <i>couth</i> 5	<i>ȳ</i>	<i>can</i> 0; <i>couth</i> 1
<i>o</i>	<i>can</i> 1; <i>couth</i> 7	<i>o</i>	<i>can</i> 0; <i>couth</i> 2
<i>u</i>	<i>can</i> 5; <i>couth</i> 5	<i>u</i>	<i>can</i> 0; <i>couth</i> 0

Henryson

<i>a</i>	<i>can</i> 24; <i>couth</i> 22
<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 7; <i>couth</i> 9
<i>ī</i>	<i>can</i> 12; <i>couth</i> 12
<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 4; <i>couth</i> 1
<i>ȳ</i>	<i>can</i> 11; <i>couth</i> 7
<i>o</i>	<i>can</i> 5; <i>couth</i> 3
<i>u</i>	<i>can</i> 3; <i>couth</i> 3

THE VOCABULARY TEST

Barbour	<i>Tak</i> 30; <i>ga</i> 25; <i>mak</i> 21; <i>say</i> 12; <i>cry</i> 11; <i>sla</i> 7; <i>say</i> 6; <i>se</i> 6.
Wyntoun	<i>Pas</i> 8; <i>mak</i> 9; <i>ga</i> 5; <i>say</i> 9; <i>tak</i> 3; <i>se</i> 3.
Blind Harry	<i>Far</i> 26; <i>gang</i> 12; <i>tak</i> 18; <i>pas</i> 14; <i>ride</i> 9; <i>draw</i> 14.
Holland	Data too slight to be of any value.
Henryson	<i>Tak</i> 6; <i>cry</i> 6; <i>declair</i> 3; <i>pas</i> 3; <i>hyng</i> 3; <i>call</i> 3; <i>sing</i> 3; <i>say</i> 3; <i>crepe</i> 3.

These tests may well be applied to three other groups of poems of uncertain authorship to see what results can be obtained and whether these results can be of any assistance in settling the question of authorship. The first group consists of those poems that have been attributed at one time or another to Barbour, the second group of those attributed to Huchown, and the third group of those associated in one way or another with the name of James the First. At the end of the study the tests will be applied to *The Twa Freiris of Berwick* and *The Thre Tailis of the Thre Preistis of Peblis* to see if the results justify the supposition that these, poems are by the same author, and to *Sir Orfeo* to determine, if possible, the chronology.

Barbour has been accredited with *The Legends of the Saints*, *The Buik of Alexander the Great*, and fragments of a poem on the subject of the Trojan War. A glance at the preceding table shows the canon of Barbour's usage.

Auxiliary test *can* 185; *couth* 4.

Vowel test A *a* 118; all other vowels 71.

B *a* with *can* 116; *a* with *couth* 2.

Vocabulary test *Tak* 30; *ga* 25; *mak* 21; *say* 12; *cry* 11; *sla* 7; *say* 6; *se* 6.

Fragment I of *The Trojan War* is short. It contains 1 case of *can* and 4 cases of *couth*, but a compound infinitive with *couth* in one case raises the number of verbs to 5. *A* occurs only 1 time, and then it is used with *couth*. *Can* is used with *ē*. *Couth* is used 1 time with *a*, 1 time with *ī*, and 3 times with *ē*. Fragment II is much longer than Fragment I. *Can* occurs 36 times with no double infinitives, *couth* 9 times with no double infinitives. If both fragments are considered the work of one man, the auxiliary test yields a result for both of *can* 37; *couth* 14. The vowel test A yields a proportion of *a* 17; all other vowels 24. However 5 cases of *o* that represents *a* in a genuine Scottish form have not been counted *a* in this reckoning. With them counted the score stands *a* 22; all other vowels 18. Vowel test B yields a proportion of *a* with *can* 14; *a* with *couth* 3. If the *o*'s in the text that represent Scottish *a*'s are counted the score stands *a* with *can* 17; *a* with

couth 5. The vocabulary test shows the following results; *mak* 5, *pas* 3, *tak* 4, *say* 4. The proportions obtained from these results are slightly similar to Barbour's but are not Barbour's.

When the prolog and the first five stories in *The Legends of the Saints* are examined, a different state of affairs is discovered. The auxiliary test shows a proportion of *can* 136; *couth* 8. This is nearer the proportion of Barbour's *Bruce* though not the exact proportion. The vowel test A shows *a* 47; all other vowels 97. This is not Barbour's proportion. Vowels test B shows the following results:

<i>a</i>	<i>can</i> 47; <i>couth</i> 2
<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 51; <i>couth</i> 3
<i>ī</i>	<i>can</i> 11; <i>couth</i> 1
<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 10; <i>couth</i> 0
<i>ī</i>	<i>can</i> 8; <i>couth</i> 2
<i>o</i>	<i>can</i> 1; <i>couth</i> 0

This test does not show anything like Barbour's usage. The predominance of *ē* over *a*, 54 to 49, is especially noteworthy. The vocabulary test shows that three words recur; *mak* 12, *tak* 12, *say* 19. *Mak* is spelled *may* 1 time and forced to rime with *say*. All three words were favorites with Barbour, but he used *say* much less frequently than *tak* or *mak*.

In *The Foray of Gadderis*, the first part of *The Buik of Alexander the Great*, the auxiliary test shows *can* 51; *couth* 11. Vowel test A shows *a* 32; all other vowels 30. Vowel test B gives the following results:

<i>a</i>	<i>can</i> 26; <i>couth</i> 6
<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 16; <i>couth</i> 3
<i>ī</i>	<i>can</i> 3; <i>couth</i> 1
<i>ī</i>	<i>can</i> 3; <i>couth</i> 0
<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 1; <i>couth</i> 0
<i>o</i>	<i>can</i> 0; <i>couth</i> 1
<i>u</i>	<i>can</i> 2; <i>couth</i> 0

The vocabulary test shows *mak* 9, *gang* 6, *tak* 5, *say* 4, *beir* 4. *Mak*, *tak*, *gang*, and *say* shows some resemblance to Barbour.

The tests when applied to these three monuments show a divergence from Barbour's usage in the *Bruce*. The evidence shows no reason for attributing them to Barbour. But it indicates, if the tests may serve as a guide for chronology, that the poems belong to a period, if not contemporary with Barbour's own, at least shortly following it.

The chief poems that Huchown has been accused or suspected of writing are the *Morte Arthure*, *The Gest Hystoryale of the Destruction of Troy*, the *Pistill of Susan*, the *Awntyrs of Arthur*, *Golagros and Gawane*, and *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knyght*.

In the course of this investigation notes were made on all these poems except *The Destruction of Troy*. No evidence is forthcoming from *Morte Arthure*. It is an alliterative poem with no rimes. Neither *can* nor *couth* is used in it as a preteritive auxiliary. A glance at pages chosen at random from *The Destruction of Troy* indicates the same state of affairs there. *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knyght* is also alliterative though written in stanzaic form; but 4 instances of *can* as a preteritive auxiliary were observed. It is used with *studie*, *onsware*, *enclyne*, and *roun*; *u* occurs 2 times, *a* and *i* 1 time each.

The *Pistill of Susan* is the poem that has been attributed most confidently to the unknown Huchown. The oldest manuscript is dated 1380 approximately. The extant versions are all in a Midland English dialect, but the poem has been claimed as Scottish on the plea that some of the rime-words are Scottish forms. Neither *can* nor *couth* appears as the preteritive auxiliary, but *gan* appears 6 times, in all of which the auxiliary and the infinitive are the last words of the line. The words used as infinitives are *playe*, *say*, *hynge*, *lende*, *mele*, and *apere*. Not a single infinitive confesses to *a* in the accented syllable, a state of affairs that is very surprising in a Scottish poem that in its original form must have been considerably earlier than 1380. This use of *gan* resembles the use of *gan* in the Middle English romances more than it resembles the use of *can* in the poems that are indubitably Scottish.

Three different poems have been proposed as being the poem of Huchown's referred to by Wyntoun as the *Awntyrs of Gawane*; they are *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knyght*, *Sir Golagros and Sir Gawane*, and the *Awntyrs of Arthur*. The first of these has been examined.

Sir Golagros and Sir Gawane was printed by Chepman and Myllar in their miscellany of 1508. There is no manuscript of it. When the auxiliary test is applied, the proportion is found to stand *can* 21; *couth* 11. But if 3 cases in which the meaning of *couth* is not clear are subtracted, the proportion stands *can* 21; *couth* 8. This proportion does not indicate an origin in the

fourteenth century, the time the *Pistill of Susan* was written. When the vowel test A is applied, it is found that the proportion is *a* 7; all other vowels 22. This is not a fourteenth century proportion. When vowel test B is applied, the following results are obtained:

<i>a</i>	<i>can</i> 6; <i>couth</i> 1
<i>ē</i>	<i>can</i> 3; <i>couth</i> 6
<i>ī</i>	<i>can</i> 3; <i>couth</i> 0
<i>ȳ</i>	<i>can</i> 3; <i>couth</i> 4
<i>o</i>	<i>can</i> 1; <i>couth</i> 0
<i>u</i>	<i>can</i> 4; <i>couth</i> 0

The preference for *couth* with *ē* indicates the time of Blind Harry as the time of composition. When the vocabulary test is applied, *say* is seen to occur 3 times, *daw* 2, and *found* 2.

The *Awntyrs of Arthur* exists in several manuscripts, but none of them is clearly Scottish. Here again the investigator is confronted with the difficulty of variant readings in the manuscripts. The periphrastic preterite occurs 7 times in the Thornton manuscript, but 4 of these are replaced by other words entirely in the Douce manuscript. The Douce manuscript reads *can* 1 time where the word is not used in the Thornton manuscript. The Thornton manuscript spells the auxiliary *gane* or *gune*; the Douce and Ireland manuscripts spell it *cane* or *con*. For the sake of argument, it might be well to accept all cases of the form found in all the manuscripts and to disregard the variant readings; there are then 8 cases to be considered. When the auxiliary test is applied, the proportion is found to be *can* 8; *couth* 0. When the vowel test is applied it is found that the proportion is *a* 4; all other vowels 4. When the vocabulary test is applied, it is found that *calle* occurs 2 times; all other verbs occur only 1 time each.

When the tests are applied to the Huchownian poems and the results are examined, it must be agreed that the evidence does not show common authorship. It must be confessed, however, that the material is rather slight, and that of itself it is not strong enough to prove or disprove authorship in this particular case.

The Kingis Quhair, *The Quair of Jelousy*, and *Lancelot of the Laik* form a small group of poems because of the contention on the part of some that *The Kingis Quhair* and *The Quair of Jelousy* are the work of the same author, and the contention on the part of others that *The Quair of Jelousy* and *Lancelot of the Laik* are

the work of the same man. The tests previously applied yield little in the way of definite results here. The periphrastic preterite, as has been said several times already, is essentially a narrative idiom. The narrative portion of *The Quair of Jelousy* is rather slight. *Can* occurs 1 time with *crye* and 1 time with *declare* to form what is undoubtedly a preterite; *gan* is used 1 time with *fare* preceded by *to*, but the signification may be inchoative rather than preteritive. In *Kingis Quhair* *can* is used 1 time when it is certainly the preteritive auxiliary, and then it is used with *swym*. *Gan* is used 15 times; 5 times with *a*, 3 times with *ȝ*, 2 times with *ē*, 2 times with *o*, 2 times with *u*, 1 time with *ē*, and 1 times with *ī*. *Couth* does not occur in a single case in which it might not be potential as well as or better than preteritive. In *Lancelot of the Laik* the state of affairs is not so badly confused though *gan* and *can* seem to be written interchangeably; no attempt will be made to distinguish them. *Couth* occurs only 1 time when it cannot be anything but preteritive. *Can*, or *gan*, occurs with 62 verbs; *couth* with 1. *Can* is used with *a* 11 times, with *ē* 19, with *ī* 9, with *ē* 9 with *ȝ* 2, with *o* 9, with *u* 3. *The Quair of Jelousy* contains too little material for comparison with *The Kingis Quhair* or *Lancelot of the Laik*.

Two other poems are to be associated with *The Kingis Quhair*, *Peblis to the Play* and *Christis Kirk on the Grene*, in that they are attributed to the same author. In the first of these poems the composer has shown great metrical dexterity in that he has been able to achieve his rimes without resort to the periphrastic preterite. There is no instance of *can* or *couth* so used in the whole poem. On the other hand *Christis Kirk on the Grene* contains *can*, *couth*, and *did*, but *couth* most frequently. *Can* occurs 1 time and is used with *rummill*; *couth* occurs 5 times and is used with *lans*, *steir*, *wary*, *fedder* and *quell*. The presence of *did* and the preponderance of *couth* would date this poem late. Neither poem according to these tests shows any affinity with *The Kingis Quhair*.

The *Thre Tailis of the Thre Preistis of Peblis* and *The Twa Freiris of Berwick* have been suspected of being written by the same man. They will be subjected to the tests that have already been used, and the results compared.

When the auxiliary test is applied to the *Thre Tailis*, the proportion is found to be *can* 17; *couth* 9. Vowel test A yields

the proportion of *a* 8; all other vowels 18. Vowel test B shows the following results:

a can 6; couth 2
ē can 5; couth 6
ī can 1; couth 0
ē can 2; couth 0
ȳ can 2; couth 0
o can 2; couth 0
u can 1; couth 1

When the vocabulary test is applied, it is found that *mak* and *say* occur 2 times each and that no other word is repeated.

When the auxiliary test is applied to the *Twa Freiris*, the proportion is found to be *can* 3; *couth* 11. Vowel test A yields the proportion of *a* 1; all other vowels 13. Vowel test B yields the following results:

a can 0; couth 1
ē can 2; couth 5
ī can 1; couth 2
ē can 0; couth 1
ȳ can 0; couth 0
o can 0; couth 0
u can 0; couth 2

When the vocabulary test is applied, it is found that *say* is used 5 times, *cry* 2 times, and that no other word is repeated. The evidence gained from these tests does not show that the poems are the work of the same man.

Sir Orfeo was printed by Ritson; it occurs in a manuscript of the fifteenth century. When the auxiliary test is applied, the proportion is found to be *can* 13; *couth* 1. Vowel test A, the only one of any value here, shows that *a* occurs 5 times. But *go* occurs 4 times. In a purely Scottish text, however, the vowel would be *a*. The vowel proportion, then, really stands *a* 9; all other vowels 5. When the vocabulary test is applied, it is found that *go* appears 4 times, *mak* 2 times. This evidence shows that the poem in its original form belongs apparently to the fourteenth century and that it was perhaps contemporary with *The Bruce*.

The results gained from this investigation are historical and critical. The historical results show that the periphrastic preterite was a highly artificial form. The reason for its invention is not evident; there was an idiom corresponding to it in Anglo-

Saxon. But once invented, it was used to lengthen the line or to throw the desired word into the rime position. At first it appeared most frequently in combination with certain words, but there is no evidence to show just why these particular combinations were so frequent. The usage was then quickly extended to other combinations. *Can* as the preteritive auxiliary was current and interchangeable with *gan* at the time when Barbour wrote *The Bruce* in the second half of the fourteenth century. Although *gan* continued in use throughout the whole period and survived in nineteenth century ballad poetry, *can* became the more usual auxiliary for a time; but it soon began to lose ground to *couth*. By the middle of the fifteenth century *couth* was slightly the more preferable form. Both *can* and *couth* gave way at the close of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries to *did*. The critical results are the tests for chronology and authorship. These, however, should be used with great caution. In many cases the small amount of text makes exactness impossible. Furthermore, mathematical proportions and data gained from investigations of grammatical usage cannot be expected to yield absolutely accurate results. For these reasons the tests are valuable mainly as supplementary evidence and should not be used alone.

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